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A Critical Need for College Student Personnel Services

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Colleges and universities today are confronted with a variety of changing conditions that demand attention; indeed, the formulation of appropriate and effective responses to a changing world has become increasingly important to the survival and viability of institutions. Changes in society, in the higher education enterprise, and in the types and characteristics of students are among those issues that must be addressed.

Increasingly, the efforts of student affairs aimed at improving quality of life, integrating new student groups, and attracting and retaining students are becoming critical to institutions attempting to maintain enrollments of qualified students, assure placement of graduates, develop supportive alumni, and enhance academic involvement. Institutions' employment of these strategies in response to changing conditions creates opportunities for student affairs professionals to become leaders within the institution as they offer important contributions to institutional vitality. This time is a significant period in the evolution of student affairs.

To What Changes Must Student Affairs Organizations Respond?

Institutions and their student affairs organizations are confronted with various changes in their contexts and clienteles. The first group of these trends, leading to change in society, is witnessed by a decreasing birth rate, growth of minority subpopulations, the evolving information society, growing narcissism, and the legacy of the baby boom. Second, institutions and student affairs must respond to changes in the higher education enterprise—changing financial conditions, increased planning, increased judicial intervention, and the growing application of management techniques to higher education. Third, students are changing. Minority participation is growing, vocationalism is increasing, and students' characteristics, values, and needs are changing.

In What Ways Can Student Affairs Provide Leadership?

In response to changing conditions, institutions are devoting efforts to managing enrollments, using institutional marketing strategies to attract new student clienteles and to retain current students; increasing private funding; planning carefully and managing resources effectively; modifying programs and services to meet changing needs; and introducing activities aimed at enhancing students' involvement in college life.

Current efforts support the increasing congruity between the goals of student affairs and the goals of the institution; efforts by student affairs organizations aimed at the individual and group development, student integration, and student involvement, once regarded as peripheral to the academic mission of the institution (McConnell 1970), have become increasingly important to institutions in their efforts to enhance institutional vitality. Student affairs departments are enhancing the involvement of students in the academic experience, engaging in preventive law, integrating new student groups, participating in the recruitment and retention of students, and helping to develop supportive alumni (Baldridge, Kemerer, and Green 1982). As student affairs professionals achieve institutional support in their pursuit of the traditional goals of student development, recognition of an expanded role for student affairs is demanded.

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What New Role Is Emerging?

The student affairs organization shares the orientations of the three major campus groups—faculty, students, and administrators—and its position on the borders of these groups may be its greatest strength.

> *Our uniqueness as student personnel workers rests on our ability to fashion significant educational environments, using the resources, values, norms, and opportunities of the variety of constituencies on our campuses. To the extent that we are successful in our innovative work, we will be respected, not because of position, but as a result of the impacts we have on campus life. Truly, student personnel workers have the opportunities to be central figures for campus improvement in an era when resources must be perceived as newly combined rather than as new* (Silverman 1980, p. 12).

The term "integrator" is appropriate for the student affairs professional who integrates student development and institutional development.

"An alert, assertive response to these forces [changing conditions] will make student affairs essential to institutional effectiveness and therefore worthy of adequate support" (Shaffer 1984, p. 112). Recognition of the importance of student affairs to institutional vitality is growing, and student affairs administrators must assume leadership in formulating and managing institutional responses to changing conditions.

Serving as integrators of goals within institutions, student affairs professionals will become more centrally involved in the direction of the institution if they are able to build stronger bridges to the academic and administrative communities. The challenges are many, but student affairs professionals have the opportunity to lead efforts that will affect the entire institution. And goals, priorities, and values will be better integrated as a result of these efforts.

What Implications Does This New Role Have?

A new role for student affairs calls for changes in the programs and services offered by student affairs, the professional skills required by student affairs administrators, and the content of the preparation and development of professionals. Several programs and services stand to be enhanced by the changing role: enrollment management, programs and services designed to serve the needs of nontraditional students, and activities designed to enhance career planning and placement.

To assume a stronger position of leadership within the institution, student affairs professionals must possess a wider repertoire of skills. In addition to the traditional skills in human relations, student affairs professionals must develop the organizational skills demanded by an expanded role within the institution, including those directed at general management and planning, resource management, information management, institutional politics, and research and evaluation.

The development of new skills for student affairs professionals has clear implications for the preparation and continuing professional education of individuals in the profession. Currently, most preparation programs and recommended curricula for the preparation of new professionals concentrate on counseling and the human relations skills necessary for entry-level practitioners and pay little attention to the administrative or organizational skills demanded by the emerging role of integrator. A changing role for student affairs demands different skills. Therefore, graduate programs at both the master's and doctoral levels must embrace such topics as organizational behavior and development, management and planning in higher education, and the development of higher education. Further, continuing professional education must work toward the development and enhancement of these skills in an organized and comprehensive fashion.

A new role also creates challenges for the application of student development. If student development is to offer guidance to the profession and become more useful to the student affairs integrator, then several issues must be addressed: (1) the understanding and application of student development within the field to enhance the theoretical credibility of student affairs professionals; (2) the expansion of student development theory to encompass increasing numbers of nontraditional students; and (3) the integration of student and organizational development (Borland 1980).

To better serve as integrators within the institution, student affairs professionals must:

1. assess the environment of the institution
2. comprehend institutional issues and internal politics
3. develop professional credibility with faculty
4. become experts on students' expectations, needs, and interests and be able to articulate them to others in the institution
5. be able to explain the goals of student affairs and student development to others in the institution in terms that are meaningful to them
6. contribute to the quality of the academic experience
7. contribute to the effective and efficient management of the institution and be prepared to take leadership in the formulation of institutional responses to changing conditions
8. develop appropriate skills.

Furthermore, institutions, if they are to take advantage of the real and potential contributions of student affairs should:

1. recognize, enhance, and support the efforts of student affairs
2. consider student affairs full partners in the institution
3. challenge student affairs professionals to make greater contributions to the institution.

In addition, student personnel preparation programs must be revised to develop the skills necessary for the profession, including greater attention to management and organizational skills. And finally, the national associations for student affairs must:

1. provide direction for new professional roles
2. promote continuing professional education at all levels.

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ABSTRACT

The efforts of student affairs aimed at improving quality of life, integrating new student groups, and attracting and retaining students are becoming critical to colleges and universities. Student affairs organizations can respond to the changing conditions and take a leadership role in new institutional strategies; they can become "integrators" of goals within the institutions, building stronger bridges to the academic and administrative communities. Student affairs professionals must possess a wider repertoire of skills, adding general management and planning skills to traditional human relations skills. This widened role has implications for the preparation of continuing professional education of individuals in the profession, and graduate programs must adapt to changing needs. (LB)

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